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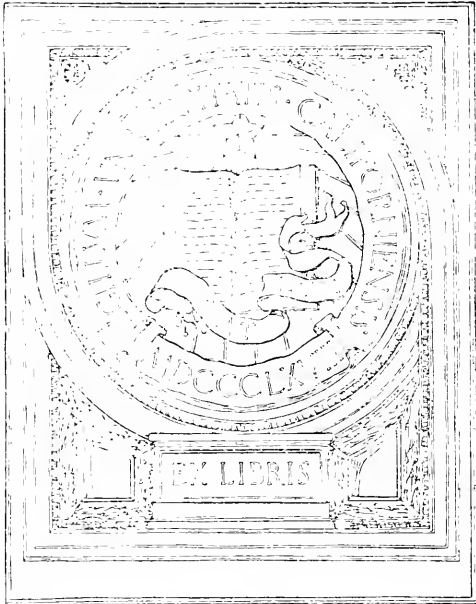


UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY

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AN

ADDRESS,

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE MERCANTILE LIBRARY COMPANY,

OF

PHILADELPHIA,

May 11, 1841.

BY WILLIAM E. CHANNING.

PHILADELPHIA:

J. CRISSY, PRINTER, NUMBER FOUR MINOR STREET.

1841.

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MERCANTILE LIBRARY.

May 12th, 1841.

At a Special Meeting of the Directors, held this day, the following resolutions were adopted :—

Resolved, That the thanks of the Board of Directors on behalf of the Mercantile Library Company of Philadelphia, be presented to Dr. William E. Channing for his very appropriate, instructive, and eloquent Address, delivered before the Company last evening; and that a copy thereof be requested for publication.

Resolved, That Isaac Barton, John Fausset, and Henry C. Corbit be a committee to communicate to Dr. Channing the foregoing resolution.

THOMAS P. COPE, *President*.

JOHN J. THOMPSON, *Secretary*.

Philadelphia, May 13th, 1841.

DEAR SIR,

We have been directed to communicate to you the inclosed resolution, unanimously adopted by the Directors of the Mercantile Library Company, testifying the deep sense of their obligation for the able, and highly interesting discourse, pronounced by you before the Company, and many other Citizens, on the 11th instant; and requesting you would favour them with a copy for publication.

It affords us much pleasure to perform the duty thus devolved upon us; and we avail ourselves of the occasion, to express, individually, our esteem for your character, and an ardent desire, that your life, devoted as it has been to the improvement of your fellow men, may be prolonged to a late period; and that you may enjoy all the blessings attendant on time well employed.

With great respect,
We are yours, &c.

ISAAC BARTON,
JOHN FAUSSET,
HENRY C. CORBIT,
Committee.

DR. WILLIAM E. CHANNING.

TO THE COMMITTEE OF THE MERCANTILE LIBRARY COMPANY.

GENTLEMEN,

I am truly grateful for the kind manner in which my Address was received, and for the resolution which you have communicated from the Directors of your Association. I place the Address in your hands for publication. I wish I could hope, that it is to be read with the interest with which it was heard. I believe, however, that with all its imperfections, it expresses some important truths, to which I shall be glad to call the attention even of a few. With the best wishes for your institution, and with sentiments of respect for its Directors,

I am, Gentlemen,
very truly,
Your friend,

WM. E. CHANNING

Philadelphia, May 15th 1841

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TO MY VENERABLE FRIEND,

JOHN VAUGHAN, ESQ.,

WHO HAS MADE THE PAST GENERATION AND THE PRESENT HIS DEBTORS

BY UNWEARIED WELL-DOING,

THIS ADDRESS IS AFFECTIONATELY,

AND RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED.

W E. C.

A D D R E S S .

GENTLEMEN OF THE MERCANTILE LIBRARY COMPANY,

I BEG you to consider my appearance in this place, as an expression of my interest in this and in kindred Institutions. I welcome them as signs of the times, as promises and means of increased intellectual activity. I shall be glad, if a good word or a friendly effort on my part can serve them. I know, that the lectures delivered before such societies are called superficial ; but this does not discourage me. All human productions, even those of genius, are very superficial, compared with the unfathomable depths of truth. The simple question is, do these lectures rouse the mind to new action ? Do they give it new objects of thought, and excite a thirst for knowledge ? I am sure that they do, and therefore, though the field is sometimes called humble, I enter it with pleasure.—Will you allow me to observe, that to render lectures useful, one condition is necessary ; they must be frank, honest, free. He who speaks, must speak what he thinks ; speak courteously, but uncompromisingly. What makes our communica-

tions unprofitable in this country, is the dread of giving offence, now to the majority, and now to the fashionable or refined. We speak without force, because not true to our convictions. A lecturer will, of course, desire to wound no man's prejudices or feelings; but his first duty is to truth; his chief power lies in simple, natural, strong utterance of what he believes; and he should put confidence in his hearers, that the tone of manly sincerity will be responded to by candor and good will.

The subject to which I call your attention, is the Present Age; a vast theme, demanding volumes. An age is needed to expound an age; and, of course, little is to be expected in a brief hour. I profess no great understanding of the subject, though I have given it much thought. In truth, it cannot be grasped, as yet, by the highest intellect. This age is the result, issue, of all former ages. All are pouring themselves into it. The struggles, passions, discoveries, revolutions of all former time, survive in their influences on the present moment. To interpret the present thoroughly, we must understand and unfold all the past. This work I shall not undertake. I am not now to be an historian. Do not fear, that I shall compel you to journey backward to the deluge or to paradise. I shall look only at the present; nor do I think of unfolding all the present. I shall seize on a single characteristic of our age, if not the profoundest, yet the most prominent and best fitted to an address like the present. In performing

this task, my aim will be to speak the simple truth. I wish to say what the age is, not to be its advocate; and yet I hope to lead you to look tenderly and trustfully on it, to love it, and to resolve, with generous, stout hearts, that you will serve it, as far as God may give you ability.

In looking at our age, I am struck, immediately, with one commanding characteristic, and that is, the tendency in all its movements to expansion, to diffusion, to Universality. To this, I ask your attention. This tendency is directly opposed to the spirit of exclusiveness, restriction, narrowness, monopoly, which has prevailed in past ages. Human action is now freer, more unconfined. All goods, advantages, helps, are more open to all. The privileged, petted individual is becoming less, and the human race are becoming more. The multitude is rising from the dust. Once we heard of the few, now of the many; once of the prerogatives of a part; now of the rights of all. We are looking as never before, through the disguises, envelopments of ranks and classes, to the common nature which lies below them, and are beginning to learn, that every being who partakes of it, has noble powers to cultivate, solemn duties to perform, inalienable rights to assert, a vast destiny to accomplish. The grand idea of humanity, of the importance of man as man, is spreading silently, but surely. Not that the worth of the human being is at all understood as it should be; but the truth is glimmering through the darkness. A faint con-

sciousness of it has seized on the public mind. Even the most abject portions of society are visited by some dreams of a better condition, for which they were designed. The grand doctrine, that every human being should have the means of self-culture, of progress in knowledge and virtue, of health, comfort, and happiness, of exercising the powers and affections of a man, this is slowly taking its place, as the highest social truth. That the world was made for all, and not for a few; that society is to care for all; that no human being shall perish but through his own fault; that the great end of government is to spread a shield over the rights of all, these propositions are growing into axioms, and the spirit of them is coming forth in all the departments of life.

If we look at the various movements of our age, we shall see in them this tendency to universality and diffusion. Look first at Science and Literature. Where is Science now? Locked up in a few colleges or royal societies or inaccessible volumes? Are its experiments mysteries for a few privileged eyes? Are its portals guarded by a dark phraseology, which, to the multitude, is a foreign tongue? No; Science has now left her retreats, her shades, her selected company of votaries, and, with familiar tone, begun the work of instructing the race. Through the press, discoveries and theories, once the monopoly of philosophers, have become the property of the multitude. Its professors, heard not long ago in the university or some narrow school, now

speak in the Mechanic Institute. The doctrine, that the labourer should understand the principles of his art, should be able to explain the laws and processes which he turns to account; that instead of working as a machine, he should join intelligence to his toil, is no longer listened to as a dream. Science, once the greatest of distinctions, is becoming popular. A lady gives us conversations on chemistry, revealing to the minds of our youth vast laws of the universe, which, fifty years ago, had not dawned on the greatest minds. The school books of our children contain grand views of the creation. There are parts of our country, in which Lyceums spring up in almost every village, for the purpose of mutual aid in the study of natural science. The characteristic of our age then is not the improvement of science, rapid as this is, so much as its extension to all men.

The same characteristic will appear, if we enquire into the use now made of science. Is it simply a matter of speculation? a topic of discourse? an employment of the intellect? In this case, the multitude, with all their means of instruction, would find in it only a hurried gratification. But one of the distinctions of our time is, that science has passed from speculation into life. Indeed, it is not pursued enough for its intellectual, and contemplative uses. It is sought as a mighty power, by which nature is not only to be opened to thought, but to be subjected to our needs. It is conferring on us that dominion over earth, sea, and air,

which was prophesied in the first command given to man by his Maker ; and this dominion is now employed, not to exalt a few, but to multiply the comforts and ornaments of life for the multitude of men. Science has become an inexhaustible mechanician ; and by her forges, and mills, and steam cars, and printer's presses, is bestowing on millions, not only comforts, but luxuries which were once the distinction of a few.

Another illustration of the tendency of science to expansion and universality may be found in its aims and objects. Science has burst all bounds and is aiming to comprehend the universe, and thus it multiplies fields of enquiry for all orders of minds. There is no province of nature which it does not invade. Not content with exploring the darkest periods of human history, it goes behind the birth of the human race, and studies the stupendous changes which our globe experienced for hundreds of centuries, to become prepared for man's abode. Not content with researches into visible nature, it is putting forth all its energies to detect the laws of invisible and imponderable matter. Difficulties only provoke it to new efforts. It would lay open the secrets of the polar ocean and of untrodden barbarous lands. Above all it investigates the laws of social progress, of arts and institutions of government and political economy, proposing as its great end the alleviation of all human burthens, the weal of all the members of the human race. In truth, nothing is more characteristic of our age, than the vast range of enquiry which

is opening more and more to the multitude of men. Thought frees the old bounds to which men used to confine themselves. It holds nothing too sacred for investigation. It calls the past to account; and treats hoary opinions as if they were of yesterday's growth. No reverence drives it back. No great name terrifies it. The foundations of what seems most settled must be explored. Undoubtedly this is a perilous tendency. Men forget the limits of their powers. They question the infinite, the unsearchable, with an audacious self-reliance. They shock pious and revering minds, and rush into an extravagance of doubt, more unphilosophical and foolish than the weakest credulity. Still, in this dangerous wildness, we see what I am stating, the tendency to expansion in the movements of thought.

I have hitherto spoken of science, and what is true of science, is still more true of Literature. Books are now placed within reach of all. Works, once too costly except for the opulent, are now to be found on the labourer's shelf. Genius sends its light into cottages. The great names of literature are become household words among the crowd. Every party, religious or political, scatters its sheets on all the winds. We may lament and too justly the small comparative benefit, as yet accomplished by this agency; but this ought not to surprise or discourage us. In our present stage of improvement, books of little worth, deficient in taste and judgment and ministering to men's prejudice and passions, will almost certainly be circulated too freely.

Men are never very wise and select in the exercise of a new power. Mistake, error, is the discipline through which we advance. It is an undoubted fact, that silently books of a higher order are taking place of the worthless. Happily the instability of the human mind works sometimes for good, as well as evil. Men grow tired at length even of amusements. Works of fiction cease to interest them; and they turn from novels to books, which, having their origin in deep principles of our nature, retain their hold of the human mind for ages. At any rate, we see in the present diffusion of literature, the tendency to universality of which I have spoken.

The same tendency will appear, if we consider the kind of literature which is obtaining the widest favour. The works of genius of our age breathe a spirit of universal sympathy. The great poet of our times, Wordsworth, one of the few who are to live, has gone to common life, to the feelings of our universal nature, to the obscure and neglected portions of society, for beautiful and touching themes. Nor ought it to be said, that he has shed over these, the charms of his genius; as if in themselves they had nothing grand or lovely. Genius is not a creator, in the sense of fancying or feigning what does not exist. Its distinction is, to discern more of truth than common minds. It sees, under disguises and humble forms, everlasting beauty. This it is the prerogative of Wordsworth to discern and reveal in the ordinary walks of life, in the common human heart.

He has revealed the loveliness of the primitive feelings, of the universal affections of the human soul. The grand truth which pervades his poetry is, that the beautiful is not confined to the rare, the new, the distant, to scenery and modes of life open only to the few; but that it is poured forth profusely on the common earth and sky, that it gleams from the loneliest flower, that it lights up the humblest sphere, that the sweetest affections lodge in lowly hearts, that there is sacredness, dignity and loveliness in lives which few eyes rest on, that even in the absence of all intellectual culture, the domestic relations can quietly nourish that disinterestedness, which is the element of all greatness, and without which, intellectual power is a splendid deformity. Wordsworth is the poet of humanity; he teaches reverence for our universal nature; he breaks down the factitious barriers between human hearts.

The same is true in an inferior degree of Scott, whose tastes however were more aristocratic. Scott had a childish love of rank, titles, show, pageants, and in general looked with keener eye on the outward life than into the soul. Still he had a human heart and sympathised with his race. With few exceptions, he was just to all his human brethren. A reconciling spirit breathes through his writings. He seizes on the interesting and beautiful features in all conditions of life; gives us bursts of tender and noble feelings even from ruder natures; and continually knits some new tie between the reader and the vast varieties of human nature which

start up under his teeming pen. He delighted indeed in Highland chiefs, in border thieves and murderers, in fierce men and fierce encounters. But he had an eye to catch the stream of sweet afflictions, as it wound its way through humble life. What light has Jeanie Deans shed on the path of the obscure ! He was too wanting in the religious sentiment, to comprehend the solemn bearing, the stern grandeur of the Puritans. But we must not charge with narrowness a writer, who embodied in a Jewish maiden his highest conceptions of female nobleness.

Another writer illustrating the liberalizing, all-harmonizing tendency of our times, is Dickens, whose genius has sought and found subjects of thrilling interest in the passions, sufferings, virtues of the mass of the people. He shows, that life in its rudest forms may wear a tragic grandeur ; that amidst follies and sensual excesses, provoking laughter or scorn, the moral feelings do not wholly die ; and that the haunts of the blackest crimes are sometimes lighted up by the presence and influence of the noblest souls. He has indeed greatly erred, in turning so often the degradation of humanity into matter of sport ; but the tendency of his dark pictures is to awaken sympathy with our race, to change the unfeeling indifference which has prevailed towards the depressed multitude, into sorrowful and indignant sensibility to their wrongs and woes.

The remarks now made on literature, might be extended to the Fine Arts. In these we see too the ten-

dency to universality. It is said, that the spirit of the great artists has died out; but the taste for their works is spreading. By the improvements of engraving, and the invention of casts, the genius of the great masters is going abroad. Their conceptions are no longer pent up in galleries open to but few, but meet us in our homes, and are the household pleasures of millions. Works, designed for the halls and eyes of emperors, popes, and nobles, find their way, in no poor representations, into humble dwellings, and sometimes give a consciousness of kindred powers to the child of poverty. The art of drawing, which lies at the foundation of most of the fine arts, and is the best education of the eye for nature, is becoming a branch of common education, and in some countries is taught in schools to which all classes are admitted.

I am reminded, by this remark, of the most striking feature of our times, and showing its tendency to universality, and that is, the unparalleled and constantly accelerated diffusion of education. This greatest of arts, as yet little understood, is making sure progress, because its principles are more and more sought in the common nature of man; and the great truth is spreading, that every man has a right to its aid. Accordingly education is becoming the work of nations. Even in the despotic governments of Europe, schools are open for every child without distinction; and not only the elements of reading and writing, but music and drawing are taught, and a foundation is laid for future pro-

gress in history, geography, and physical science. The greatest minds are at work on popular education. The revenues of states are applied most liberally, not to the universities for the few, but to the common schools. Undoubtedly, much remains to be done; especially a new rank in society is to be given to the teacher; but even in this respect a revolution has commenced, and we are beginning to look on the guides of the young as the chief benefactors of mankind.

I thought, that I had finished my illustrations on this point; but there has suddenly occurred to me another sign of the tendency to universal intellectual action in this country, a sign which we are prone to smile at, but which is yet worthy of notice. I refer to the commonness among us of public speaking. If we may trust our newspapers, we are a nation of orators. Every meeting overflows with eloquence. Men of all conditions find a tongue for public debate. Undoubtedly, there is more sound than sense, in our endless speeches before all kinds of assemblies and societies. But no man, I think, can attend our public meetings, without being struck with the force and propriety of expression in multitudes, whose condition has confined them to a very imperfect culture. This exercise of the intellect, which has almost become a national characteristic, is not to be undervalued. Speech is not merely the dress, as it is often called, but the very body of thought. It is to the intellect what the muscles are to the principle of physical life. The mind acts and strengthens itself

through words. It is a chaos till defined, organized by language. The attempt to give clear precise utterance to thought, is one of the most effectual processes of mental discipline. It is, therefore, no doubtful sign of the growing intelligence of a people, when the power of expression is cultivated extensively for the purpose of acting on multitudes. We have here one invaluable influence of popular institutions. They present at the same moment to a whole people great subjects of thought, and bring multitudes to the earnest discussion of them. Here are, indeed, moral dangers; but still strong incitements to general intellectual action. It is in such stirring schools, after all, that the mind of a people is chiefly formed. Events of deep general interest quicken us more than formal teaching; and by these the civilized world is to be more and more trained to thought.

Thus we see in the intellectual movements of our times, the tendency to expansion, to universality; and this must continue. It is not an accident, or an inexplicable result, or a violence on nature; it is founded in eternal truth. Every mind was made for growth, for knowledge; and its nature is sinned against, when it is doomed to ignorance. The divine gift of intelligence was bestowed for higher uses than bodily labour, than to make hewers of wood, drawers of water, ploughmen, or servants. Every being, so gifted, is intended to acquaint himself with God and his works, and to perform wisely and disinterestedly the duties of

life. Accordingly, when we see the multitude of men beginning to thirst for knowledge, for intellectual action, for something more than an animal life, we see the great design of nature about to be accomplished ; and society, having received this impulse, will never rest, till it shall have taken such a form, as will place within every man's reach the means of intellectual culture. This is the revolution to which we are tending ; and without this all outward political changes would be but children's play, leaving the great work of society yet to be done.

I have now viewed the age in its Intellectual aspects. If we look next at its Religious movements, we shall see in these the same tendency to universality. It is more and more understood, that religious truth is every man's property and right ; that it is committed to no order or individual, to no priest, minister, student, or sage, to be given or kept back at will ; but that every man may, and should seek it for himself ; that every man is to see with his own mind, as well as with his own eyes ; and that God's illuminating spirit is alike promised to every honest and humble seeker after truth. This recognition of every man's right of judgment, appears in the teachings of all denominations of Christians. In all, the tone of authority is giving place to that of reason and persuasion. Men of all ranks are more and more addressed, as those who must weigh and settle for themselves the grandest truths of religion.

The same tendency to universality, is seen in the generous toleration which marks our times, in comparison with the past. Men, in general, cannot now endure to think, that their own narrow church holds all the goodness on the earth. Religion is less and less regarded as a name, a form, a creed, a church, and more and more as the spirit of Christ which works under all forms and all sects. True, much intolerance remains; its separating walls are not fallen; but with a few exceptions, they no longer reach to the clouds. Many of them have crumbled away, till the men whom they sever, can shake hands, and exchange words of fellowship, and recognize in one another's faces the features of brethren.

At the present day the grand truth of religion is more and more brought out; I mean the truth, that God is the Universal Father, that every soul is infinitely precious to him, that he has no favorites, no partial attachments, no respect of persons, that he desires alike the virtue and everlasting good of all. In the city of Penn, I cannot but remember the testimony to this truth, borne by George Fox and his followers, who planted themselves on the grand principle, that God's illuminating spirit is shed on every soul, not only within the bounds of Christendom, but through the whole earth. This universal impartial love of God is manifested to us more and more by science, which reveals to us vast all-pervading laws of nature, administered with no favoritism and designed for the good of all. I know,

that this principle is not universally received. Men have always been inclined to frame a local, partial, national or sectarian God, to shut up the Infinite One in some petty enclosure; but at this moment, larger views of God are so far extended, that they illustrate the spirit of the age.

If we next consider by Whom religion is taught, we shall see the same tendency to diffusion and universality. Religious teaching is passing into all hands. It has ceased to be a monopoly. For example, what an immense amount of instruction is communicated in Sunday schools. These are spreading over the Christian world, and through these the door of teaching is open to crowds, to almost all indeed who would bear a part in spreading religion. In like manner, associations of vast extent are springing up in our cities for the teaching of the poor. By these means, Woman especially is becoming an evangelist. She is not only a priestess in her own home, instilling with sweet loving voice the first truths of religion into the opening mind; but she goes abroad on missions of piety. Woman, in one age made man's drudge, and in another, his toy, is now sharing more and more with him the highest labours. Through the press, especially, she is heard far and wide. The press is a mightier power than the pulpit. Books outstrip the voice; and woman availing herself of this agency, becomes the teacher of nations. In churches, where she may not speak, her hymns are sung; the inspirations of her genius are

felt. Thus our age is breaking down the monopolies of the past.

But a more striking illustration remains. One of the great distinctions of our times, is found in the more clear and vital perception of the truth, that the universal impartial love, which is the glory of God, is the characteristic spirit and glory of Christianity. To this we owe the extension of philanthropic and religious effort, beyond all former experience. How much we are better, on the whole, than former times, I do not say ; but that benevolence is acting on a larger scale, in more various forms, to more distant objects, this we cannot deny. Call it pretension or enthusiasm, or what you will, the fact remains ; and it attests the diffusive tendencies of our times. Benevolence now gathers together her armies. Vast associations are spread over whole countries for assailing evils, which, it is thought, cannot be met by the single-handed. There is hardly a form of evil, which has not awakened some antagonist effort. Associated benevolence gives eyes to the blind and ears to the deaf, and is achieving even greater wonders ; that is, it approaches the mind without the avenues of eye and ear, and gives to the hopelessly blind and deaf the invaluable knowledge which these senses afford to others. Benevolence now shuts out no human being, however low, from its regard. It goes to the cell of the criminal with words of hope, and is labouring to mitigate public punishment, to make it the instrument not of vengeance but reform. It

remembers the slave, pleads his cause with God and man, recognizes in him a human brother, respects in him the sacred rights of humanity, and claims for him not as a boon, but as a right, that freedom, without which humanity withers and God's child is degraded into a tool or a brute. Still more, benevolence now is passing all limits of country and ocean. It would send our own best blessing to the ends of the earth. It would make the wilderness of heathenism bloom, and join all nations in the bonds of one holy and loving faith. Thus, if we look at the religious movements of the age, we see in them that tendency to diffusion and universality, which I have named as its most striking characteristic.

Let me briefly point out this same tendency in Government. Here, indeed, it is too obvious for illustration. To what is the civilized world tending? To popular institutions, or what is the same thing, to the influence of the people, of the mass of men, over public affairs. A little while ago, and the people were unknown as a power in the state. Now they are getting all power into their hands. Even in despotisms, where they cannot act through institutions, they act through public opinion. Intelligence is strength; and in proportion as the many grow intelligent, they must guide the world. Kings and nobles fill less and less place in history; and the names of men, who once were lost amidst the glare of courts and titles, are now written there imperishably. Once, history did not know that

the multitude existed, except when they were gathered together on the field of battle, to be sabred and shot down for the glory of their masters. Now, they are coming forward into the foreground of her picture. It is now understood that government exists for one end, and one alone; and that is, not the glory of the governor, not the pomp and pleasure of a few, but the good, the safety, the rights of all. Once, government was an inherited monopoly, guarded by the doctrine of divine right, of an exclusive commission from the Most High. Now, office and dignity are thrown open as common things, and nations are convulsed by the multitude of competitors for the prize of public power. Once, the policy of governments had no higher end than to concentrate property into a few hands, and to confirm the relation of dependent and lord. Now, it aims to give to each the means of acquiring property, and of carving out his fortune for himself. Such is the political current of our times. Many look on it with dark forebodings as on a desolating torrent; while others hail it as a fertilizing stream. But in one thing, both agree; whether torrent or stream, the mighty current exists, and overflows, and cannot be confined; and it shows us in the political, as in the other movements of our age, the tendency to universality, to diffusion.

I shall notice but one more movement of the age as indicating the tendency to universality, and this is its Industry. How numberless are the forms which this takes! Into how many channels is human labour pour-

ing itself forth! How widely spread is the passion for acquisition, not for simple means of subsistence, but for wealth! What vast enterprises agitate the community! What a rush into all the departments of trade! How next to universal the insanity of speculation! What new arts spring up! Industry pierces the forests, and startles with her axe the everlasting silence. To you, Gentlemen, commerce is the commanding interest; and this has no limits but the habitable world. It no longer creeps along the shore, or lingers in accustomed tracks, but penetrates into every inlet, plunges into the heart of uncivilized lands, sends its steam-ships up unexplored rivers, girdles the earth with railroads, and thus breaks down the estrangements of nations. Commerce is a noble calling. It mediates between distant nations, and makes men's wants, not, as formerly, stimulants to war, but bonds of peace. The universal intellectual activity of which I have spoken, is due, in no small degree, to commerce, which spreads the thoughts, inventions, and writings of great men over the earth, and gathers scientific and literary men every where into an intellectual republic. So it carries abroad the missionary, the Bible, the Cross, and is giving universality to true religion. Gentlemen, allow me to express an earnest desire and hope, that the merchants of this country will carry on their calling with these generous views. Let them not pursue it for themselves alone. Let them rejoice to spread improvements far and wide, and to unite men in more friendly

ties. Let them adopt maxims of trade, which will establish general confidence. Especially in their intercourse with less cultivated tribes, let them feel themselves bound to be harbingers of civilization. Let their voyages be missions of humanity, useful arts, science, and religion. It is a painful thought, that commerce, instead of enlightening and purifying less privileged communities, has too often made the name of Christian hateful to them, has carried to the savage, not our useful arts and mild faith, but weapons of war and the intoxicating draught. I call not on God to smite with his lightnings, to overwhelm with his storms the accursed ship, which goes to the ignorant, rude native, freighted with poison and death; which goes to add new ferocity to savage life, new licentiousness to savage sensuality. I have learned not to call down fire from heaven. But, in the name of humanity, of religion, of God, I implore the merchants of this country, not to use the light of a higher civilization to corrupt, to destroy our uncivilized brethren. Brethren they are in those rude huts, in that wild attire. Establish with them an intercourse of usefulness, justice, and charity. Before they can understand the name of Christ, let them see his spirit in those by whom it is borne. It has been said, that the commerce of our country is not only corrupting uncivilized countries, but that it wears a deeper, more damning stain; that, in spite of the laws of the land and the protest of nations, it sometimes lends itself to the slave-trade;

that, by its capital, and accommodations, and swift sailers, and false papers, and prostituted flag, it takes part in tearing the African from his home and native shore, and in dooming him, first to the horrors of the middle passage, and then to the hopelessness of perpetual bondage. Even on men so fallen I call down no curse. May they find forgiveness from God through the pains of sincere repentance; but continuing what they are, can I help shrinking from them as among the most infamous of their race?

Allow me to say a word to the merchants of our country on another subject. The time is come, when they are particularly called to take yet more generous views of their vocation, and to give commerce a universality as yet unknown. I refer to the juster principles which are gaining ground on the subject of free trade, and to the growing disposition of nations to promote it. Free trade!—this is the plain duty and plain interest of the human race. To level all barriers to free exchange; to cut up the system of restriction, root and branch; to open every port on earth to every product; this is the office of enlightened humanity. To this a free nation should especially pledge itself. Freedom of the seas; freedom of harbours; an intercourse of nations, free as the winds; this is not a dream of philanthropists. We are tending towards it, and let us hasten it. Under a wiser and more Christian civilization, we shall look back on our present restrictions, as we do on the swaddling bands, by which, in darker

times, the human body was compressed. The growing freedom of trade is another and glorious illustration of the tendency of our age to universality.

I have thus aimed to show in the principal movements of our time the character of diffusion and universality, and in doing this, I have used language implying my joy in this great feature of our age. But you will not suppose, that I see in it nothing but good. Human affairs admit no unmixed good. This very tendency has its perils and evils. To take but one example; the opening of vast prospects of wealth to the multitude of men has stirred up a fierce competition, a wild spirit of speculation, a feverish insatiable cupidity, under which fraud, bankruptey, distrust, distress, are fearfully multiplied, so that the name of American has become a by-word beyond the ocean. I see the danger of the present state of society, perhaps as clearly as any one. But still I rejoice to have been born in this age. It is still true, that human nature was made for growth, expansion; this is its proper life, and this must not be checked because it has perils. The child, when it shoots up into youth, exchanges its early repose and security for new passions, for strong emotions, which are full of danger; but would we keep him forever a child? Danger we cannot avoid. It is a grand element of human life. We always walk on precipices. It is unmanly,

unwise, it shows a want of faith in God and humanity, to deny to others and ourselves free scope and the expansion of our best powers, because of the possible collisions and pains to be feared from extending activity. Many, indeed, sigh for security as the supreme good. But God intends us for something better, for effort, conflict, and progress. And is it not well to live in a stirring and mighty world, even though we suffer from it? If we look at outward nature, we find ourselves surrounded with vast and fearful elements, air, sea, and fire, which sometimes burst all bounds, and overwhelm man and his labours in ruin. But who of us would annihilate these awful forces, would make the ocean a standing pool, and put to silence the loud blast, in order that life may escape every peril. This mysterious, infinite, irresistible might of nature, breaking out in countless forms and motions, makes nature the true school for man, and gives it all its interest. In the soul still mightier forces are pent up, and their expansion has its perils. But all are from God, who has blended with them checks, restraints, balances, reactions, by which all work together for good. Let us never forget, that, amidst this fearful stir, there is a paternal Providence, under which the education of our race has gone on, and a higher condition of humanity has been achieved.

There are, however, not a few, who have painful fears of evil from the restless, earnest action, which we have seen spreading itself more and more through all depart-

ments of society. They call the age wild, lawless, presumptuous, without reverence. All men, they tell us, are bursting their spheres, quitting their ranks, aspiring selfishly after gain and pre-eminence. The blind multitude are forsaking their natural leaders. The poor, who are the majority, are contriving against the rich. Still more, a dangerous fanaticism threatens destruction to the world under the name of Reform; society totters; property is shaken; and the universal freedom of thought and action, of which so many boast, is the precursor of social storms, which only despotism can calm. Such are the alarms of not a few; and it is right that fear should utter its prophecies, as well as hope. But it is the true office of fear, to give a wise direction to human effort, not to chill or destroy it. To despair of the race, even in the worst times, is unmanly, unchristian. How much more so in times like the present! What I most lament in these apprehensions, is the utter distrust of human nature which they discover. Its highest powers are thought to be given only to be restrained. They are thought to be safe only when in fetters. To me, there is an approach to impiety in thinking so meanly of God's greatest work. Human nature is not a tiger which needs a constant chain. In this case, it is the chain which makes the tiger. It is the oppressor, who has made man fit only for a yoke.

When I look into the great movements of the age, particularly as manifested in our own country, they seem to me to justify no overwhelming fear. True,

they are earnest and wide spreading; but the objects to which they are directed are pledges against extensive harm. For example, ought the general diffusion of science and literature and thought, to strike dread? Do habits of reading breed revolt? Does the astronomer traverse the skies, or the geologist pierce the earth, to gather materials for assault on the social state? Does the study of nature stir up rebellion against its author? Is it the lesson which men learn from history, that they are to better their condition by disturbing the State? Does the reading of poetry train us to insurrection? Does the diffusion of a sense of beauty through a people incline them to tumult? Are not works of genius and the fine arts soothing influences? Is not a shelf of books, in a poor man's house, some pledge of his keeping the peace? It is not denied, that thought, in its freedom, questions and assails the holiest truth. But is truth so weak, so puny, as to need to be guarded by bayonets from assault? Has truth no beauty, no might? Has the human soul no power to weigh its evidence, to reverence its grandeur? Besides, does not freedom of thought, when most unrestrained, carry a conservative power in itself. In such a state of things, the erring do not all embrace the same error. Whilst truth is one and the same, falsehood is infinitely various. It is a house divided against itself, and cannot stand. Error soon passes away, unless upheld by restraint on thought. History tells us, and the lesson is invaluable, that the physical force, which has

put down free inquiry, has been the main bulwark of the superstitions and illusions of past ages.

In the next place, if we look at the chief direction of the universal activity of the age, we shall find that it is a conservative one, so as to render social convulsion next to impossible. On what, after all, are the main energies of this restlessness spent? On property, on wealth. High and low, rich and poor, are running the race of accumulation. Property is the prize for which all strain their nerves; and the vast majority compass in some measure this end. And is such a society in danger of convulsion? Is tumult the way to wealth? Is a state of insecurity coveted by men, who own something and hope for more? Are civil laws, which, after all, have property for their chief concern, very likely to be trodden under foot by its worshippers? Of all the dreams of fear, few seem to me more baseless than the dread of anarchy among a people, who are possessed almost to a man with the passion for gain. I am especially amused, when, among such a people, I sometimes hear of danger to property and society, from enthusiastic, romantic reformers, who preach levelling doctrines, equality of wealth, quaker plainness of dress, vegetable food, and community-systems where all are to toil and divide earnings alike. What! Danger from romance and enthusiasm in this money-getting, self-seeking, self-indulging, self-displaying land! I confess, that to me it is a comfort to see some outbreak of enthusiasm, whether transcendental, philanthropic, or religious, as

a proof, that the human spirit is not wholly ingulphed in matter and business, that it can lift up a little the mountains of worldliness and sense with which it is so borne down. It will be time enough to fear, when we shall see fanaticism of any kind stopping ever so little the wheels of business or pleasure, driving ever so little from man's mind the idea of gain, or from woman's the love of display. Are any of you dreading an innovating enthusiasm? You need only to step into the streets to be assured, that property and the world are standing their ground against the spirit of reform, as stoutly as the most worldly man could desire.

Another view which quiets my fear as to social order from the universal activity of the times, is the fact that this activity appears so much in the form of steady labour. It is one distinction of modern over ancient times, that we have grown more patient of toil. Our danger is from habits of drudgery. The citizens of Greece and Rome were above work. We seem to work with something of the instinct of the ant and the bee; and this is no mean security against lawlessness and revolt.

Another circumstance of our times which favours a quiet state of things, is the love of comforts which the progress of arts and industry has spread over the community. In feudal ages and ancient times, the mass of the population had no such pleasant homes, no such defences against cold and storms, no such decent apparel, no such abundant and savoury meals, as fall to

the lot of our population. Now, it must be confessed, though not very flattering to human nature, that men are very slow to part with these comforts, even in defence of a good cause, much less to throw them away in wild and senseless civil broils.

Another element of security, in the present, is the strength of domestic affection. Christianity has given new sacredness to home, new tenderness to love, new force to the ties of husband and wife, parent and child. Social order is dear to us all, as encircling and sheltering our homes. In ancient and rude times, the family bond was comparatively no restraint. We should all pause, before we put in peril beings whom we hold most dear.

Once more; Christianity is a pledge of social order which none of us sufficiently prize. Weak as its influence seems to be, there are vast numbers into whom it has infused sentiments of justice, of kindness, of reverence for God, and of deep concern for the peace and order of the state. Rapine and bloodshed would awaken now a horror altogether unknown in ages, in which this mild and divine truth had not exerted its power.—With all these influences in favour of social influence, have we much to fear from the free, earnest universal movements of our times? I believe that the very extension of human powers is to bring with it new checks against their abuse.

The prosperous part of society are, of course, particularly liable to the fear of which I have spoken.

They see danger especially in the extension of power and freedom of all kinds to the laboring classes of society. They look with a jealous eye on attempts to elevate these, though one would think, that to improve a man was the surest way to disarm his violence. They talk of agrarianism. They dread a system of universal pillage. They dread a conspiracy of the needy against the rich. Now the manual laborer has burdens enough to bear, without the load of groundless suspicion or reproach. It ought to be understood, that the great enemies to society are not found in its poorer ranks. The mass may, indeed, be used as tools; but the stirring and guiding powers of insurrection are found above. Communities fall by the vices of the prosperous ranks. We are referred to Rome, which was robbed of her liberties, and reduced to the most degrading vassalage, by the lawlessness of the plebians, who sold themselves to demagogues, and gave the republic into the hands of a dictator. But what made the plebians an idle, dissolute, rapacious horde? It was the system of universal rapine, which, under the name of conquest, had been carried on for ages by patricians, by all the powers of the State; a system, which glutted Rome with the spoils of the pillaged world; which fed her population without labour, from the public treasures, and corrupted them by public shows. It was this, which helped to make the metropolis of the earth a sink of crime and pollution, such as the world had never

known. It was time that the grand robber-state should be cast down from her guilty eminence. Her brutish populace, which followed Cæsar's car with shouts, was not worse than the venal, crouching senate which registered his decrees. Let not the poor bear the burden of the rich. At this moment we are groaning over the depressed and dishonoured state of our country; and who, let me ask, have shaken its credit, and made so many of its institutions bankrupt? The poor, or the rich? Whence is it, that the incomes of the widow, the orphan, the aged, have been narrowed, and multitudes on both sides of the ocean brought to the brink of want? Is it from an outbreak of popular fury? Is it from gangs of thieves, sprung from the mob? We know the truth, and it shows us where the great danger to property lies.

Communities fall by the vices of the great, not the small. The French Revolution is perpetually sounded in our ears, as a warning against the lawlessness of the people. But whence came this revolution? Who were the regicides? Who beheaded Louis XVI? You tell me the Jacobins; but history tells a different tale. I will show you the beheaders of Louis XVI. They were Louis XIV, and the Regent who followed him, and Louis the XV. These brought their descendant to the guillotine. The priesthood, who revoked the edict of Nantz, and drove from France the skill and industry and virtue and piety which were the sinews of her strength; the statesmen who intoxicated

Louis XIV. with the scheme of universal empire ; the profligate, prodigal, shameless Orleans ; and the still more brutalized Louis the XV, with his court of panders and prostitutes ; these made the nation bankrupt, broke asunder the bond of loyalty, and overwhelmed the throne and altar in ruins. We hear of the horrors of the revolution ; but in this as in other things, we recollect the effect without thinking of the guiltier cause. The revolution was indeed a scene of horror ; but when I look back on the reigns which preceded it, and which made Paris almost one great stew and gaming house, and when I see altar and throne desecrated by a licentiousness unsurpassed in any former age, I look on scenes as shocking to the calm and searching eye of reason and virtue, as the 10th of August and the massacres of September. Bloodshed is indeed a terrible spectacle ; but there are other things almost as fearful as blood. There are crimes that do not make us start and turn pale like the guillotine, but are deadlier in their workings. God forbid, that I should say a word to weaken the thrill of horror, with which we contemplate the outrages of the French Revolution. But when I hear that revolution quoted to frighten us from reform, to show us the danger of lifting up the depressed and ignorant mass, I must ask whence it came ? and the answer is, that it came from the intolerable weight of misgovernment and tyranny, from the utter want of culture among the mass of the people, and from a corruption of the great, too deep to

be purged away except by destruction. I am also compelled to remember, that the people, in this their singular madness, wrought far less woe than kings and priests have wrought, as a familiar thing, in all ages of the world. All the murders of the French Revolution did not amount, I think, by one-fifth, to those of the 'Massacre of St. Bartholomew.' The priesthood and the throne, in one short night and day, shed more blood, and that the best blood of France, than was spilled by Jacobinism and all other forms of violence during the whole revolution. Even the atheism and infidelity of France were due chiefly to a licentious priesthood and a licentious court. It was religion, so called, that dug her own grave. In offering this plea for the multitude, I have no desire to transfer to the multitude uncontrolled political power. I look at power in all hands with jealousy. I wish neither rich nor poor to be my masters. What I wish is, the improvement, the elevation of all classes, and especially of the most numerous class, because the most numerous, because the many are mankind, and because no social progress can be hoped but from influences which penetrate and raise the mass of men. The mass must not be confined and kept down through a vague dread of revolutions. A social order requiring such a sacrifice, would be too dearly bought. No order should satisfy us, but that which is in harmony with universal improvement and freedom.

In the general tone of this discourse, it may be thought, that I have proposed to vindicate the present

age. I have no such thought. I would improve, not laud it. I feel its imperfections and corruptions as deeply as any, though I may be most shocked by features that give others little pain. The saddest aspect of the age, to me, is that which undoubtedly contributes to social order. It is the absorption of the multitude of men in outward material interests; it is the selfish prudence, which is never tired of the labour of accumulation, and which keeps men steady, regular, respectable drudges from morning to night. The cases of a few murders, great crimes, lead multitudes to exclaim, How wicked this age! But the worst sign is, the chaining down of almost all the minds of a community to low perishable interests. It is a sad thought, that the infinite energies of the soul have no higher end, than to cover the back, and fill the belly, and keep caste in society. A few nerves, hardly visible on the surface of the tongue, create most of the endless stir around us. Undoubtedly, eating and drinking, dressing, house-building, and caste-keeping, are matters not to be despised; most of them are essential. But surely life has a higher use, than to adorn this body which is so soon to be wrapt in grave-clothes, than to keep warm and flowing the blood which is so soon to be cold and stagnant in the tomb. I rejoice in the boundless activity of the age, and I expect much of it to be given to our outward wants. But over all this activity, there should preside the great idea of that, which is alone ourselves, of our inward spiritual nature, of the thinking immortal soul, of our supreme good, our chief

end, which is, to bring out, cultivate, and perfect our highest powers, to become wise, holy, disinterested, noble beings, to unite ourselves to God by love and adoration, and to revere his image in his children. The vast activity of this age of which I have spoken, is too much confined to the sensual and material, to gain and pleasure and show. Could this activity be swayed and purified by a noble aim, not a single comfort of life would be retrenched, whilst its beauty and grace and interest would be unspeakably increased.

There is another dark feature of this age. It is the spirit of collision, contention, discord, which breaks forth in religion, in politics, in business, in private affairs; a result and necessary issue of the selfishness which prompts the endless activity of life. The mighty forces, which are this moment acting in society, are not and cannot be in harmony, for they are not governed by Love. They jar; they are discordant. Life now has little music in it. It is not only on the field of battle that men fight. They fight on the exchange. Business is war, a conflict of skill, management, and too often fraud; to snatch the prey from our neighbour is the end of all this stir. Religion is war; Christians, forsaking their one Lord, gather under various standards, to gain victory for their sects. Politics are war, breaking the whole people into fierce and unscrupulous parties, which forget their country in conflicts for office and power. The age needs nothing more than peace-makers, men of serene, com-

manding virtue, to preach in life and word the gospel of human brotherhood, to allay the fires of jealousy and hate.

I have named discouraging aspects of our time to show that I am not blind to the world I live in. But I still hope for the human race. Indeed, I could not live without hope. Were I to look on the world as many do ; were I to see in it a maze without a plan, a whirl of changes without aim, a stage for good and evil to fight without an issue, an endless motion without progress, a world where sin and idolatry are to triumph forever and the oppressor's rod never to be broken, I should turn from it with sickness of heart, and care not how soon the sentence of its destruction were fulfilled. History and philosophy plainly show to me in human nature the foundation and promise of a better era, and Christianity concurs with these. The thought of a higher condition of the world, was the secret fire which burned in the soul of the Great Founder of our religion, and in his first followers. That he was to act on all future generations, that he was sowing a seed which was to grow up and spread its branches over all nations, this great thought never forsook him in life and death. That under Christianity a civilization has grown up, containing in itself nobler elements than are found in earlier forms of society, who can deny? Great ideas and feelings, derived from this source, are now at work. Amidst the prevalence of crime and selfishness, there has sprung up in the human heart a

sentiment or principle unknown in earlier ages, an enlarged and trustful philanthropy, which recognizes the rights of every human being, which is stirred by the terrible oppressions and corruptions of the world, and which does not shrink from conflict with evil in its worst forms. There has sprung up too a faith, of which antiquity knew nothing, in the final victory of truth and right, in the elevation of men to a clearer intelligence, to more fraternal union, and to a purer worship. This faith is taking its place among the great springs of human action, is becoming even a passion in more fervent spirits. I hail it as a prophecy which is to fulfil itself. A nature capable of such an aspiration cannot be degraded forever. Ages rolled away before it was learned, that this world of matter which we tread on is in constant motion. We are beginning to learn, that the intellectual, moral, social world has its motion too, not fixed and immutable like that of matter, but one which the free will of men is to carry on, and which, instead of returning into itself like the earth's orbit, is to stretch forward forever. This hope lightens the mystery and burthen of life. It is a star which shines on me in the darkest night; and I should rejoice to reveal it to the eyes of my fellow creatures.

I have thus spoken of the Present Age. In these brief words, what a world of thought is comprehended! what infinite movements! what joys and sorrows! what hope and despair! what faith and doubt! what silent grief and loud lament! what fierce conflicts and sub-

the schemes of policy? what private and public revolutions! In the period through which many of us have passed, what thrones have been shaken! What hearts have bled! What millions have been butchered by their fellow creatures! What hopes of philanthropy have been blighted! And at the same time, what magnificent enterprises have been achieved! What new provinces won to science and art! What rights and liberties secured to nations! It is a privilege to have lived in an age so stirring, so pregnant, so eventful. It is an age never to be forgotten. Its voice of warning and encouragement is never to die. Its impression on history is indelible. Amidst its events, the American revolution, the first distinct, solemn assertion of the Rights of men, and the French revolution, that volcanic force which shook the earth to its centre, are never to pass from men's minds. Over this age, the night will indeed gather more and more, as time rolls away; but in that night two forms will appear, Washington and Napoleon, the one a lurid meteor, the other a benign, serene, and undecaying star. Another American name will live in history, your Franklin; and the kite, which brought lightning from Heaven, will be seen sailing in the clouds by remote posterity, when the city where he dwelt may be known only by its ruins. There is, however, something greater in the age than its greatest men; it is the appearance of a new power in the world, the appearance of the multitude of men on that stage, where as yet the few have acted their parts

alone. This influence is to endure to the end of time. What more of the present is to survive? Perhaps much, of which we now take no note. The glory of an age is often hidden from itself. Perhaps some word has been spoken in our day which we have not deigned to hear, but which is to grow clearer and louder through all ages. Perhaps some silent thinker among us is at work in his closet, whose name is to fill the earth. Perhaps there sleeps in his cradle some Reformer, who is to move the church and the world, who is to open a new era in history, who is to fire the human soul with new hope and new daring. What else is to survive the age? That, which the age has little thought of, but which is living in us all; I mean the Soul, the Immortal Spirit. Of this all ages are the unfoldings, and it is greater than all. We must not feel in the contemplation of the vast movements of our own and former times, as if we ourselves were nothing. I repeat it, we are greater than all. We are to survive our age, to comprehend it, and to pronounce its sentence. As yet, however, we are encompassed with darkness. The issues of our time how obscure! The future into which it opens, who of us can foresee? To the Father of all Ages I commit this future, with humble yet courageous and unfaltering hope.



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